

is good reason to think that if Saddam was as ruthless as he appeared to be, he would have wanted to cut output by less than 1 mbd, or maybe not at all.

It goes without saying that 1 mbd is less than 4.3 mbd. Therefore, the estimated damage from the hypothetical 1- mbd cut in oil output by Saddam Hussein is well below the actual damage done to the United States by the United Nations' 1990-91 restrictions on output from Iraq and Kuwait, restrictions for which the U.S. government was a key instigator.

Moreover, even these estimates of hurt are overstated. Why? Because producers in other countries do not sit passively by when the price of oil rises. When the price increases, producers produce more, in part because sources of supply that weren't worth exploiting at the previous lower price are worth tapping at a higher price. This increased production moderates the price increase from a given producer's cut in output, further limiting the damage that can be done to countries that are net importers of oil.

In 1776, Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner but from their regard for their own self-interest." Similarly, it is not due to the benevolence of the world's oil suppliers that we get our oil but from their regard for their own interests. Our oil supply is secure, not because our government threatens to use force against those who would make it insecure but because the world's oil suppliers want to make money. ■

David R. Henderson is a research fellow with the Hoover Institution and an economics professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He is co-author of Making Great Decisions in Business and Life.

An Oct. 13 *New York Times* front-page story claiming American and foreign intelligence confirmation that the Israeli strike on Syria last month was on a nuclear reactor being constructed with North Korean aid was based on misleading information leaked by Elliott Abrams and Stephen Hadley at the National Security Council. Other than Hadley and Abrams, there were no other American sources for the *Times's* account.

There is no American satellite photography indicating that the area bombed was a nuclear site. Moreover, U.S. satellites and ground collector facilities did not detect any radiation emissions following the bombing, something that would have resulted if uranium or plutonium was actually present. A CIA briefing of the Senate Appropriations Committee on Oct. 8 concluded that the intelligence community has nothing that points to a Syrian nuclear program. The Israeli information on the alleged Syrian nuclear site is not being shared with most of the U.S. intelligence community to avoid provoking negative responses.

Some senior officials in the Bush administration are worried about the media campaign directed by Vice President Dick Cheney and carried out by Abrams and Hadley trying to link North Korea to a Syrian nuclear program. Based solely on Israeli-provided evidence, Cheney appears to actually believe that North Korea is helping the Syrians establish a nuclear program, and he has discounted the skepticism of the CIA. There is high-level concern over how decisions regarding Israeli and U.S. operations directed against Syria and Iran are being made and how key officials at Defense and State are being bypassed. Cheney is alleged to be directing the campaign from an underground operations center on the grounds of the Naval Observatory in Washington, where the vice president's official residence is located. Cheney regularly remains underground, staying in contact through secure video conferencing, while his official motorcade proceeds to the White House each day as if he were in it.

An Israeli source has revealed that the Syrian raid was intended as a warning to the Iranians that Israel is fully capable of penetrating sophisticated air defenses. That was a likely consequence, but the real purpose of the incursion was to gather intelligence on a new anti-aircraft radar system being installed by Russia in both Syria and Iran. The system is called a synthetic aperture radar array. Forcing the Syrians to turn on their radar systems in response to an overflight is a way to test the effectiveness and characteristics of the system, but the Syrians apparently did not co-operate precisely because they feared that the Israelis would acquire valuable intelligence. The Israeli strike was conducted in co-ordination with the Pentagon, which is also concerned about the effectiveness of the new air defenses if there is an American attack on Iran.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates, an international security consultancy.

Secular Fundamentalists

Can atheists form a movement around shared disbelief?

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER at the Crystal Clear Atheism Conference is making the audience uncomfortable: “It seems to me that we are consenting to be viewed as a cranky subculture,” warns Sam Harris, author of the anti-religion best-seller *The End of Faith*. “We don’t want to be viewed as a marginal interest group that meets in hotel ballrooms.” The Crowne Plaza crowd squirms, but Harris is undeterred.

“We should not call ourselves atheists,” he continues. “We should not call ourselves secularists. We should not call ourselves humanists, or secular humanists, or naturalists, or skeptics, or anti-theists, or rationalists, or freethinkers, or brights. We should not call ourselves anything.” Naming next year’s conference could be difficult.

Then again, there may not be a sequel if Harris has his way: “We should go under the radar—for the rest of our lives. And while there, we should be decent, responsible people who destroy bad ideas wherever we find them.”

That’s disheartening counsel for atheists who, after years of disbelieving alone, find themselves in the midst of a revival. Ninety percent of Americans claim to believe in God, church attendance is higher than in any other Western nation, and political leaders still invoke divine blessing at the end of major addresses. But in the past three years, six books touting atheism have reached the *New York Times*’s bestseller list. Features in *Newsweek*, a fawning *Nation* cover, and endless TV appearances followed.

Forty years after *Time* asked, “Is God Dead?” atheism is getting a new hearing. Its proponents are eminent—Oxford scientist Richard Dawkins, journalist Christopher Hitchens, philosopher Daniel Dennett—and its polemics are fierce: in the post-9/11 world, religion is no longer a fantasy to be ignored but a threat to be vanquished.

Grassroots unbelievers, newly emboldened, are forming lobbying groups and staging demonstrations, hoping to blend lonely cries to “*Écrasez l’infâme*” into a mighty chorus.

Like all movements, they hold conferences. But they didn’t gather to hear that atheists should “go under the radar.” Being part of a “cranky subculture” is half the fun.

Down the hall from the ballroom is a makeshift store selling books with screeching titles like *The God Delusion* and bumper stickers that read “Have you found Jesus? Don’t tell me he’s lost again” or “Abstinence Makes the Church Grow Fondlers.” Young men with haircuts fit for their mothers’ basements wear t-shirts that say “Don’t Pray in My School and I Won’t Think in Your Church.” The pleasure of sticking an evolved thumb in the eyes of the Ned Flanders of the world seems to be a primary attraction of atheism.

This gathering of Atheists Alliance International has everything a conference of the like-minded should: a fundraising dinner, a roster of celebrity authors (who will be signing their books), a little music, and films that fit the conference’s worldview. Instead of

“The Passion of the Christ,” this weekend features Monty Python’s “The Life of Brian” and the Dawkins-produced documentary on religion, “The Root of All Evil.” There are breakout sessions on the politics of the Religious Right, creationism, and “secular parenting.”

The atheists even have their own dippy hostess, Margaret Downey, president of AAI, who tosses out globe-shaped koosh balls to the audience. The shoulder pads of her suit inhibit her throwing, but nothing can restrain her smile. Her introduction is insistently cheerful: “Atheist Alliance International has gathered together speakers who are not only extraordinary in their respective fields but who exemplify the atheist life-stance.” A man close to me raises his eyebrows, “Life-stance?”

Moments of doubt are common, even among atheists. Harris’s keynote speech occasions many. Though he peppers it with the usual cribbed-from-Voltaire insults against the pious, his call to drop the words “atheist” and “secular” makes the audience visibly uncomfortable. He goes on to denounce the easy out non-believers take in treating all religion equally: “Christians often complain that atheists, and the secular world generally, balance every criticism of Muslim extremism with a mention of Christian extremism. Our Christian neighbors, even the craziest of them, are right to be outraged by this pretense of even-handedness because the truth is that Islam is quite a bit scarier and more culpable for needless human misery than Christianity has been for a very, very long